

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Kase Higa

Kase Higa was born in Ha'ikū, Maui in 1921. He attended Pā'ia School, Maui High School and the University of Hawai'i. His schooling was interrupted, however, when the war broke out in 1941, and he worked for a time at Hickam Field.

Higa joined the U.S. Army and served in military intelligence from 1944 to 1946. He was discharged in Japan and worked as a civilian language translator until 1951, before earning a law degree at the University of Colorado.

When Higa returned to Hawai'i in 1954, he became active in local politics. In 1960 and 1964 he was the Maui County Democratic Party campaign chairman.

Higa served as a deputy county attorney for Maui from 1957 through 1964, then as the county attorney from 1964 through 1972. He was appointed district court judge in 1973 and circuit court judge in 1977, a position he served until 1983.

Kase Higa died in 1995.

Tape No. 17-42-1-89

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Kase Higa (KH)

December 14, 1989

Wailuku, Maui

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

Joy Chong: The following interview is with Kase Higa. It took place on December 14, 1989 at the Higa residence in Maui. The interviewers were Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto and Warren Nishimoto. This is videotape number one.

WN: Okay, this is tape number one, interview with Judge Kase Higa on December 14, 1989 in Wailuku. Okay, Judge Higa, let's begin by having you tell us where and when you were born.

KH: Well, I was born in Ha'ikū, Maui, 1921. Then my parents moved to Pu'ukoli'i, I guess the year that I was born. Then when I was about five, the family moved to Kāheka. And then I began going to Pā'ia School and after that to Maui High School. And after Maui High School I went to the University of Hawai'i. I started in 1938, but in 1941 the war broke out. I was a senior at that time, but they closed the school for a while. And I never got back, because after I began working a while, I volunteered for the [U.S.] Army and joined the Military Intelligence Service Language School at Camp Savage and Fort Snelling [Minnesota]. Then I served in the [U.S.] Army from 1944 to 1946. Then from 1946, as soon as I was discharged in Japan, I was offered the job as a translator in what was known as the Allied Translator Interpreter Service in Tokyo. I worked there as a civilian translator until 1951, when I decided to go to law school. I went to the University of Colorado and got my degree in 1954, came back to Hawai'i, and passed the bar. And thereafter got active in Democrat politics.

WN: I see. Okay, so when you were in Kāheka growing up, what did your father and mother do?

KH: Well, my father was a laborer with the [sugar] plantation [Maui Agricultural Company].

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, let's go to that question again. What were your parents doing in Kāheka?

KH: Well, my mother was a housewife, and my father was a laborer in the plantation. I guess he did some contract work, you know, where he and a couple of other people would take care of a particular field and get paid. And under the contract system, if they produced well enough, they could get a bonus after the cane was harvested. But eventually he ended up becoming a plumber or something for the plantation.

WN: And your mother was a housewife? Did she do any kind of side work?

KH: No. She was busy raising nine children. (Chuckles) So, we're a family of six brothers and three sisters.

WN: And the camp that you lived in, was it mostly Japanese living there?

KH: They were mostly Japanese, but I would say, about, there were 10 percent of Filipinos and 10 percent Portuguese and Puerto Ricans. Although they were kind of segregated, you know. Japanese were living one area and the other nationalities in different areas.

WN: I was wondering, too, people who talk about Kāheka—it seemed to have a lot of Okinawans living there. Is that true?

KH: Well, I guess you could say that most of them were Okinawans, but we had a sprinkling of, what they call "*Naichi*" [from main Japanese islands] people there, too. So, it wasn't exclusively Okinawans.

WN: As far as your father and mother, do you know when they came to Hawai'i?

KH: Not too clearly. Early 1900s I would say. You know, between 1900 or 1910.

WN: Growing up in Kāheka, what kinds of things did you do as child to have a good time?

KH: Well, we used to swim in the plantation ponds. Then they built a little golf course, a nine-hole golf course, between Kāheka and Pā'ia. We spent some time over there. But also busy helping the family. We raised some pigs, off and on. So we'd go and get what they called pig grass, you know, from the fields around the camp. And, of course, we had just games between ourselves.

WN: Besides getting the pig grass, did you have chores to do?

KH: Well, around the house. But not of any particular importance. Of course, well, those days, as soon as you could get to work, you know, during the summer seasons we'd go and work on the plantations pulling grass or hoeing grass. Thirty-five cents a day. (Chuckles) So, I think the first summer I started working was about sixth grade, although you're not supposed to work until about fourteen those days. You know, even if you're twelve, they'll pick you and at least make some money.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: Could you describe your house?

KH: You mean this house?

WN: No, no, in Kāheka.

KH: Oh. (Chuckles) Well, the house I essentially lived in consisted of one, two, four bedrooms, a parlor, and a kitchen. And, of course, plumbing facilities were outside. You know, your toilet

is an outhouse. At first it was an outhouse, later on they had a kind of primitive sewer system where you just had a ditch underneath the toilet where the water would be flushed constantly. And I guess the sewage went down into a valley between Kāheka and Pā'ia. I can't recall how they disposed of that, at this point. But anyway, it was typical of other plantation homes in that area. We had enough of a yard so that you could raise a few vegetables. And we kept a few chickens. Not that many, but enough for chicken once in a while. And enough vegetables. Not all the time, but for most of the time.

WN: Were the pigs for family use only?

KH: Well, there was a place the plantation set aside of the camp, where one could raise pigs. And people made their own pig sheds and raised pigs over there. So quite a few of the families were raising pigs over there. Although I don't think our family did that on a too steady a basis. As far as I can remember, maybe we had about three pigs throughout the time I was there in Kāheka.

WN: While you were going to school at Pā'ia, did you get active at all in any kind of student government or anything like that?

KH: No, not that I recall. But at Maui High School I became active in some school affairs. Well, when I was in [Pā'ia] Grammar School, for some reason, they promoted me from fifth to sixth grade some time in the middle of the term. I graduated grammar school at thirteen, so I was younger than most of the other students. At Maui High School when I was a junior, I was in the journalism class. And in the second semester they made me the assistant editor. Then when I became a senior, for the first semester, I became the editor of the school paper, *Maui High Notes*. And I was kind of proud of that because prior to that it was just a mimeographed sheet. But we got to printing it. And we did that on a weekly basis. Just a four-page newspaper, but I thought it was kind of a great achievement at that time. I also took part in debates. Well, the most I did was become an alternate on a debate team when I was a senior. So I was active in journalism and debates in high school. Of course, with my size, you know, (chuckles) couldn't compete in any kind of sports.

WN: Did you attend Japanese[-language] school?

KH: Until eighth grade. And I guess everybody expected, or most families expected their children to attend Japanese[-language] school after your regular English school. And the parents didn't insist, you know, after you graduated eighth grade. Well, most of the kids gave up going to Japanese[-language] school. Besides, after eighth grade you're in high school. From Kāheka to Maui High School, Maui High School was in H. Poko [Hāmākua Poko]. That's about, oh, roughly, I would say about two-and-a-half miles. And we had to walk that distance, although there was a train that you could catch, during the first two years. The train down in Pā'ia from Kāheka was about the same distance as going to school. So at least you're saving your train money. Then the last two years, Kahului Railroad [Company] began running buses. And the buses came around, up to Kāheka. So for the last two years at least I could ride the bus going to school. But after [entering] high school, you couldn't get to Japanese[-language] school in time anyway. So it wasn't feasible to continue going to a Japanese[-language] school. Besides, we didn't care to. (Chuckles)

WN: What was the society on Maui like at that time? I know that there was a plantation system.

Socially, what was it like?

KH: What do you mean "socially"?

WN: Well, you know, there were Japanese, there were Chinese, there were Caucasians. What am I trying to say? What was it like in terms of the social structure of society at that time?

KH: Well, we didn't bother too much with the other nationalities. But by the same token, there wasn't any kind of conflict. I didn't get to know too many of the Puerto Ricans or Portuguese in Kāheka. And as I recall now, there were very few Filipino kids. You know, there were mostly Filipino men. I think history will show that they didn't have too many wives. That's why we didn't have too many Filipino kids. So at high school there were just a handful of Filipino students. And now that you mention it, even among the Hawaiians, we didn't have too many Hawaiian students at high school that I remember. We had a lot of Portuguese. Maui High School used to draw a lot of our students from Makawao and Kula. And a lot of Portuguese lived in Makawao and Kula. They were the ranchers.

But, well, the social structure, well, I guess other people have covered what plantation life was like. I mean, you lived in a plantation house. I think you got free kerosene. I'm not sure. But some things were free. Well, your rent was free. But by the same token, your parents didn't make very much money. And a lot of parents couldn't afford to send their kids to high school. My two older brothers didn't go to high school because they had to help out with the family. But people didn't consider that a tragedy, because there were others about my older brothers' age, in the same situation. They had to go to work to help the family out. I was fortunate enough to go to high school. And the kids [siblings] below me eventually got to high school. But times were hard. (Chuckles)

I don't think---there was one family that had a car in Kāheka. You figure this is, well, I may be way off, but maybe [there were] about, oh, 75 to 100 homes. Maybe a population of about 300, 350. It may seem disproportionate, but there were some Filipinos who lived in kind of barracks by themselves. The Portuguese and the Puerto Ricans didn't have big families. The Japanese had big families. But anyway, I figure the population about 350 or maybe up to 400. But there was only one car. (Chuckles) And I never did see anybody else own a car till after the war [World War II], when I came back from Japan. And after that it became common.

WN: Did you have some idea of what you wanted to be when you were going to school?

KH: Well, not, well, I hoped I'd become a teacher. But I, you know, considering our economics those days, there weren't very many people our age going to a university. But fortunately, they had found a way to work things out. There was a territory scholarship available those days, but there was only one for each high school. It was maybe \$100 or something like that. I got a loan scholarship of \$50 from a club called the Maui Women's Club, which was composed mostly of *Haoles* and whatnot. I never got to meet the people who gave me that loan scholarship, but eventually I had to pay it back. But that was enough to get me started. At least my parents said, well, they could send me for the first year. And by then, as I remember, I got a job during the summer at the cannery [Maui Pineapple Company, Ltd.], night crew. And [pineapple] cannery work paid much better than working for the [sugar] plantation in the fields. So, I think I made about \$300 for one summer, the summer after I graduated from high school. And that was sufficient enough to at least carry me through the

first year at UH [University of Hawai'i]. Because UH, their tuition was fifty dollars a semester. And the other costs were comparatively inexpensive. And I stayed at the dorm, which was run by a fellow named John Akau. This was called Students' House.

WN: I think we should—why don't we stop right here. And then we'll change tapes and then we'll continue right from there.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: The following is a continuation of the Kase Higa interview. This is videotape number two.

WN: Tape number two with Judge Kase Higa. You were talking about going to UH and meeting a man by the name of John Akau.

KH: Yes. Right. John Akau ran a place called Students' House. And those days he had the idea that if we all worked together, we would form a co-op and pay for our own expenses. And actually, that's what we did. You know, we did our own cooking. It wasn't a regular dorm. But we paid thirty dollars a month and did all the housework and all the cooking. And people like [S.] George Fukuoka went through there. So did Nelson [K.] Doi. He went to the same dorm. So there were quite a few people who went through that dorm. And I kind of appreciate what John Akau did. Plus, after my second year, he made me the manager of the whole thing. So, to run the Students' House, he paid me thirty dollars. So, I didn't have to depend upon my family anymore. That continued until the war broke out. And when the war broke out, of course, everyone's plans all, well, had to be changed.

So when the war broke out, well, everybody had to work. So I worked at Hickam Field for a while. And then when they began calling for volunteers as interpreters and translators—my Japanese was very limited because I only went to eighth grade, but they accepted me anyway. So, I went to Camp Savage and Fort Snelling, [Minnesota]. And then, well, I went into the [U.S.] Army in 1944. Then overseas before the war ended, we were in the Philippines. But we were in the Philippines around April of 1945. And the war ended shortly after that. So, we were fortunate that we didn't have to go to the front lines. Then we were shipped to Japan and did translation and interpreter work for various divisions. I was with the 25th Division in Osaka for a while.

Then I got discharged in 1946 and was offered a job as a translator in what was known as Allied Translator and Interpreter Service. It was called "allied" because it included British and Australian personnel. In fact, our boss at the service was Australian. Anyway, I continued translation work until 1951, when I began to realize that I have a GI Bill of Rights, which will give me three or four years of education. And although the work in Japan was good and the pay was good, I figured in the long run there wouldn't be any future in it. And I was mistaken in that because people who remained there, remained until only a few years ago. They made a whole career out of it. They all retired pretty comfortably. Anyway, I decided I better take advantage of the GI Bill. (Dog barking in background.) So in 1951, I came back. And I had applied to various law schools. I got accepted at some in . . .

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: You were saying that you decided to take advantage of the GI Bill and attend law school.

KH: Right. And University of Colorado was one of the few schools that would accept students with three years of college. All you had to do was send the transcripts of your work at the UH, and if they thought you were capable of doing the work, they would accept you. It's not like today where, if you're going to law school, you have to pass a law school aptitude test. I think there are no law schools that will accept three-year undergraduate students anymore.

At any rate, I went to University of Colorado. And there, I thought I was the only one from Hawai'i. But I met five other people from Hawai'i, because (chuckles) they all had the same idea that they're going to take advantage of the GI Bill. So some of them you may know like Howard [Y.] Miyake. He used to be a [state] representative once. And Morio Omori. Morio Omori, he's an attorney in Honolulu. He was very active with Dan Inouye. He was the representative for Dan Inouye for quite a few years. You hear about him quite often in the news. There was Bob [Robert] Teruya, Ralph Kondo. Ralph Kondo used to be the tax director under Jack [Governor John A.] Burns for a while. And this fellow named Harold Yokoyama. He went through law school but he never became a lawyer.

Well, at the University of Colorado I did fairly well. I was selected on the law review. I became the case note editor the last year. And you get on the law review on the basis of your grades. If you made good grades, the faculty will select people on the law review. And also, we had a team of Hawaiians. Myself, Morio and Harold Yokoyama entered a moot court contest. You know, a moot court contest means you appear before what is supposed to be the state supreme court, and argue our case and whatnot. And I thought it was remarkable that we won. (Chuckles) At the University of Colorado, there's a library. And there's a plaque which all the winning teams have their names on there. And for 1953, you'll find our names over there.

On top of that, after I graduated in 1954, I came back in February, and even after I graduated, they awarded me a prize for the greatest contribution to the law review, which is a local prize. Nobody hears about it, but it's the Brophy Prize. And they just give you a book of your choice. But it was some kind of accomplishment, you know. And the fact that in the moot court competition, we beat all these *Haoles*, I think that was something to talk about, considering the fact that all the people from Hawai'i are not supposed to speak good English and whatnot. But that didn't deter us from winning the prize, which is based on English. Well, anyway, shall I continue?

WN: Yeah. I just had a question. I was wondering what made you decide to attend law school, other than the fact that Colorado would accept you.

KH: Well, I was . . .

WN: What made you change your mind?

KH: Well, I was always interested in politics and we've all been considered closely connected with politics, so I thought I'd like to go to law school. And I think this all came about from the fact that I was closely associated with John Akau. And John Akau was one real social-minded person. And he was always trying to start new programs and get the kids interested in social reforms, so to speak. And when you consider the fact that even when I was in the army, my parents and younger kid brothers and sisters were still in Kāheka, the youngest one was still in Kāheka, the others had probably gone to Honolulu for schooling and so forth. And just

about that time, I think 1946, there was a big [industry-wide sugar] strike. And you know when we were in the army, I used to read about these things and felt that we should try to do something about that, these things. So, in a way, I was motivated even before going to law school, to do something about some of the problems we had, especially for the laborers. I always felt sorry for all the laborers.

Well, anyway, after I came back in February, we took the bar exam. That was an accomplishment in itself, because those days they would pass only one more than 50 percent, you know, if you take the bar exam. So in our case there were fourteen who passed. And that meant that fourteen times two is twenty-eight. So twenty-[seven] of us took it. Almost 50 percent failed. It was that much of a problem, but fortunately I got through by luck.

And anyway, this was early part of 1954 and that's when the [election] campaign in Honolulu was beginning and I didn't have a job. But somehow I got to know [O'ahu Democratic County Committee Chair] Tom [Thomas P.] Gill. And he hired me as the office manager for the Democratic campaign committee. We had an office on Punchbowl Street. Those days there were some residences on Punchbowl, near Hotel Street. That's where the state capitol [building] is now. But the residences were kind of getting run down. So the Democrat, Tom Gill, rented one of those. So that was our campaign headquarters. So I was paid \$250 a month for working over there. And this was the year when I first got to know all these politicians. And although nobody knew who they were, they later got elected. And as I recall, Dan[iel K.] Inouye, Spark [M.] Matsunaga, Russell [K.] Kono and, I think, Anna Kahanamoku got elected. We [also] had people like [O.] Vincent Esposito, Steere [G.] Noda, and George [R.] Ariyoshi—was first time he was running—Philip [P.] Minn, Charlie [Charles E.] Kauhane. And, anyway, I got to know all these people. And amazingly, up to then, hardly any Democrat was elected in the fourth [senatorial] district, because the fourth district was Waikīkī and Kāhala, and those areas, there would be all *Haoles*. So nobody thought a Japanese could be elected, but all of a sudden you had four out of six candidates being elected. [In 1954, nearly half of the seats in the territorial legislature were captured by Americans of Japanese Ancestry.]

Well, the election was in '54, then in '55 we had our first session. And I worked for the [house] judiciary committee under Vincent Esposito. And then after that I began working for him in his office. And then in 1956 that was another election year. I was already working with Esposito, but I was placed on the campaign committee for the O'ahu Democratic party. And then in 1957 there was another territorial session. And Vincent Esposito was elected as speaker [of the house], so Tom Gill was his administrative assistant. And, I don't know, they gave me some kind of other title. But anyway, I was on their payroll, but mostly I was in Vincent's office and going back and forth. But this was the beginning of '57, then the session ended. Then the following year, 1958, there was a revolt against Esposito. And that's when Elmer Cravalho got elected. [Cravalho served as speaker of the house between 1959 and 1967. Esposito, from 1957 to 1959.] But by then I was on Maui, because I came to Maui around April 1957, to become part of the county attorney's office.

WN: How did you meet Vincent Esposito?

KH: Well, through the campaign. I just got to know him through the campaign.

WN: So who . . .

KH: And those days, in the campaign, you got to know all these candidates because the way you were campaigning were mostly through rallies. You know, you'd have a rally at Kaimukī [High] School or, well, let me see. Here and there. Most of the rallies where the candidates would get up and speak, say their piece. And if the newspapers reported what they said, at least they got exposure that way. But hardly any TV. A lot of radio. So, actually, campaigning in those days was not that expensive. But anyway, I got to know Vincent Esposito because if you're in these rallies, you get close together with them. You know, you're riding with them to or from, or talking to them all the time.

WN: Do you remember how you met Tom Gill?

KH: Well, I can't remember how I met him, but he hired me. And we got along real well. And I think he was a real intellectual. He was one of those responsible for the revival of the Democrat party in 1954. Tom, I have great respect for him. I think if he had played his cards right, he could have become governor. But the trouble with Tom was, he was opposed by the ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union] all the time. And somehow he got himself sided with [Arthur A.] Rutledge and that group. And the ILWU and Rutledge were always working against each other. So if you belonged to one group, already you're an enemy of the other group. That's the way things went. And that's why Tom could never get enough support. But as I say, he was a brilliant person.

WN: Okay. Why don't we change tapes.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

JC: The following is videotape number three of the Kase Higa interview.

WN: Tape number three with Judge Kase Higa.

MK: Judge Higa, you were saying that you worked under Tom Gill and you were associated with Vince Esposito. And I know that a lot of your Maui colleagues were associated with Jack Burns and the Jack Burns' Democrats. So, how did you fit into all this?

KH: When I came to Maui as deputy county attorney [in 1957], I was still interested in politics. But here on Maui, the only faction which had any kind of vitality was the pro-Burns faction. And once I came here, I got—oh, of course, I should mention that I have known Nadao Yoshinaga from high school days. And same thing with George Fukuoka. We're both graduates of the same—in 1938—same class at Maui High School. But anyway, when I came over here, naturally, I'm going to associate with Nadao Yoshinaga and George Fukuoka, my old friends. And Tom [Thomas S.] Yagi, well, he was—his family were family friends. His parents were friends of my parents. And for some reason, in Okinawa, if your parents came from the same village, you're considered kind of a calabash (chuckles) relative. So that's how we—Tom Yagi took it, because our parents came from the same village, he figured I should be close to him. So he'd come over and try to get me involved with him. And, well, every time there's some kind of problem in his family, he'd call on me. You know, when his

mother died or when they had problems with their family back in Okinawa, he'd call on me. So, we got to be—I got to know him very well.

Anyway, the gist of it is that once you came to Maui, it was all pro-Burns and you had to be in the pro-Burns group to do any kind of good. And so that's how I ended up. And I think you realize that those days, the party was more or less headed by Burns. He was the standard-bearer. And it was only proper that we should back him up. So when I came over here—I had been working at the legislature—so I got reacquainted with George Fukuoka, Nadao Yoshinaga, and got to know all the other active officeholders. And, naturally, I got involved in politics. So I came [to Maui] in 1957, in 1958 there was an election. I was the campaign chairman for the Democrat [territorial] senate candidates. And that was Yoshinaga, Fukuoka, John [G.] Duarte, and Tom [Thomas S.] Ogata for the first time. And the three of them got in. And by campaign manager, that means that I used to handle the finances. I tried to collect as much money as I could. Of course, the candidates themselves—I think those days they all put in \$500 in the pot. And, you know, if they could get any other contributions from other people, well, all the better. But as I explained, those days, running an election was kind of cheap because it was more grass-roots things. The money went for advertising, newspapers, some radio advertising, no TV, for maybe a few parties—not too many—coffee hours, and things like that. So the fact—most of my time was spent trying to organize different communities. We had four [Democratic] senators in 1958. Those four senators had to run throughout the county, which means all of the county of Maui, [including] Lāna'i and Moloka'i. And Moloka'i and Lāna'i, we depended on the ILWU. They had some men. Okay, what we did do is ask the ILWU to name us some people that we can call upon to help the senate Democrats. And what they would do is pass out brochures mostly.

JC: Excuse me, excuse me. Can you stop? If we could just back up a little bit. Okay.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

KH: Okay. I was explaining how we ran a campaign. As I said, this was grass roots. What this meant was that we would get people from practically every block in Kahului and Wailuku, the central part of Maui. And between the candidates, we would know at least someone, for example, who's in this block, all up and down the street. We didn't want a person to take a whole community by themselves. And we found that to be very effective. So in Kahului, we must have had about twenty people on different streets. And in Wailuku, maybe twenty to forty people on different streets. Our theory was that if you had one person with a banner outside, a respectable person touting the Democrat party, then the others would. . . . And if he's respected, they'd be afraid to go against him, eh. And I think there's some validity to that theory. So, if you're the first one to put up a banner saying you're for the Democrats, that would impress people. Anyway, we did that for Wailuku and Kahului.

And Kula, we had—well, it's a spread-out place. So what we did was just pick out whatever farmers we could to spread things out. In Hāna we found some county workers. And now remember, those days the county was run by Eddie [Edward F.] Tam, he's a Democrat. So we could rely upon Eddie. So, you know, having the county in Democrat hands means something, because you can get some workers from the county to help out. And that way we run a pretty successful campaign.

Then, let's see, I remember I ran the campaign for the Democrat senators a second time. This

was, I forgot what year, but . . .

WN: The first one was '58 and the next one is '59?

KH: Fifty-nine? Can I see that?

WN: Sure.

KH: Oh, yes. Oh, '58 was [Thomas S.] Ogata and [Nadao] Yoshinaga.

WN: Mm hmm.

KH: Then in '59 this was a [special] statehood [election].

WN: Statehood, right.

KH: Yeah. That's right. And that's why it kind of skipped my mind. But in '59, [John] Duarte, Fukuoka, Ogata, and Yoshinaga ran. In '58, Ogata and Yoshinaga, they both got in without problems. But their term was cut short because of the—we became a state. So they had to run all over again. So in '59, three—Fukuoka, Ogata and Yoshinaga—got in. Then in 1960, the senators weren't running. So I became the Maui County Democratic party chairman. So I ran the whole campaign for the party. Then in '62, Yoshinaga had to run again, because he was lowest. He had the lowest [number of] votes [among the elected Democratic senators] in 1959. So his term was short. It was a three-year term. And he had to find a partner, so he picked on Harry [M.] Field. And I don't know if you remember Harry Field. Harry Field is a Hawaiian, used to be a football player. And he was a very interesting fellow, but Najo [Nadao Yoshinaga] always told him what to do. And at least he was a Democrat, but they both got in. Then in 1964, that was, I guess, my last term as running the Democratic party campaign. After that I became the county attorney and I had to run myself. So, I guess that's the reason I wasn't running things for other people.

WN: Besides Yoshinaga, who were some of the people who were the leaders of the party on Maui at that time?

KH: Well, I would say [Masaru] "Pundy" Yokouchi was very influential. Elmer [F. Cravalho] was always there. He was the county committee chairman, I think, most of the time. [Cravalho was chair from 1967 to 1968, then mayor beginning in 1969.] I can't remember anybody else, until later when Miyamoto became county committee chairman. But I think he succeeded Elmer much later. Then we had Martin Luna also become county committee chairman. But I think by then I was out of it, having become a judge and, you know, you can't actively participate in politics once you become a judge.

WN: As chairman of the senate team for the Democratic party on Maui, did you have any say as to who ran and who didn't run?

KH: No, no. It was a wide open field, although we tried to select—I guess there was some discussion between Jack Burns and people in Honolulu, and people on Maui as to who should run. For example, I forgot when I persuaded George Fukuoka to run again, but I didn't run his campaign the second time. I think he and David [K.] Trask, [Jr.] ran that time. I'm not

sure, but on that occasion I know, you know, Pundy will come to ask me. He'd say, well, the governor asked him to get George Fukuoka to run. So the governor was involved in some of these things.

WN: Was that the year that Duarte was asked to step down and run for the house?

KH: What's that?

WN: Was that the year that John [G.] Duarte was asked to step down from his senate seat and run for the house?

KH: Well, I don't know. After he got defeated in [1959] he, well, before he got defeated, there was some kind of scandal involving John Duarte. Something about the rug or something.

MK: Flying carpet [Refers to legislators who take home office property.].

(Laughter)

WN: Yeah, flying carpet.

KH: Yeah, flying carpet.

MK: The flying carpet incident.

KH: And so, I guess he wasn't favored very much. Although we treated him nicely, we figured that his time had come. He was getting old. So he'd run for the house and he ran for the board of supervisors. But by then, people weren't paying too much attention to him. Although I kind of liked him, and we never insulted him or anything like that, but we all thought that he had served quite a few years as a legislator, so he should step down.

MK: We were wondering, you know, to what extent was there a slate-making process in those [19]60s?

KH: Well, I don't think, I think mostly it was a matter of the candidates themselves, discussing who should do what. And a lot of times, people will defer to other people just because they're friends. For example, if the slate was already full, the party or everybody would try to discourage other people from running in the primary if it's already full. And I think in [Mamoru] Yamasaki's case, he could have moved to the senate a lot earlier, but when he saw Fukuoka and Trask running, he wouldn't join. If there was a vacancy, then he would try for the senate. And, well, that's the way things went. And people kind of appreciate that if you don't, well, upset the applecart by becoming too ambitious. Like the last example here was when Herbert Honda was running for the house. [Robert H.] Nakasone challenged him in the primary. And he got defeated kind of bad, because I don't think people appreciated the fact that Herbert Honda was unopposed. If a Republican opposed him, well, that's a different matter, but if it's a Democrat opposing him in the primary, it causes everybody a lot of distress. Like I know some people say, "Oh, I contribute to both." You know, because they're friends of both. But, it poses a dilemma as to who they're going to vote for, right? After all, Maui is still a small place. It's like where you get to know a lot of people personally.

WN: Okay, why don't we change tapes then?

MK: Okay.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: The following is part four, tape number four of the Kase Higa interview. And this is the last tape.

WN: Tape number four with Judge Kase Higa.

MK: Okay, I guess we can open up this tape with a discussion on Toshio ["Toshi"] Ansai. Toshio Ansai is a Republican who's been very successful in staying in office, . . .

KH: Mm hmm.

MK: . . . either on in the board of supervisors, the Maui [County] council, or in the legislature.

KH: Right.

MK: And I was wondering, as a Democrat, how would you assess Toshio Ansai's strength in Maui?

KH: Well, in Toshi's case, I guess, you'd have to say it's personality. So even when all the Democrats (chuckles) get in, he has enough friends so that he gets elected all the time. And Toshi has a good personality. He gets along very well with people. I'm kind of partisan myself, I was the county attorney when he was a member of the board of supervisors, but I got along with him very well. Some other Republican supervisors, well, not so well, but Toshi always got along with people. And wherever you go, especially Wailuku, Kahului, he has a lot of personal friends. And there are some politicians like that. Like I came to Maui when it was still [called] the [Maui County] board of supervisors [until 1968, when it was named Maui County council. The title of "chairman" was changed to "mayor".] And the county clerk, and the county auditor, and the county treasurer used to be elected. Well, Toshi Enomoto [Toshio G.N. Enomoto] was a Republican, but he was always reelected county clerk. And, you know, even in a Democrat year, Toshi would beat anybody. In fact one year [1954], Edwin Wasano ran against him. Edwin Wasano used to be a ILWU official. He had more votes than Toshi in the primary. But when came to the general, he had less votes than he had in the primary. (Chuckles) Which just doesn't make sense, which means that some people voted for him in the primary, turned around and voted for Toshi Enomoto in the general. But those things happen, just because of personality.

But in my case, I don't have to make any comparisons, because I wasn't opposed, so I had no way of telling how many people liked me. (MK chuckles.) As a matter of fact, we used to have fun. Most of us were all unopposed, the county treasurer, the county clerk, and the county auditor. Between the county auditor, county clerk and myself [county attorney], the two times I ran, they would always point out to me that all three were unopposed, but I had the least votes.

(Laughter)

KH: Well, that's because, I told them, I have only run twice and they've been running for a number of years. It's like a institution.

WN: How close was the ILWU to the Democratic party?

KH: Well, here on Maui I would say they were a big asset to the Democratic party. Because in the [19]60s, the ILWU was fairly strong yet, they had good membership. And they had good leadership. You know, Tom Yagi was a leader and everybody recognizes that he was very assertive and very aggressive. And he had a lot of respect among the union members. So the union vote meant something those days. I don't know about now, but it meant something those days. So if you had the union vote, well, that's half the battle. If you didn't have the union backing, you had a tough time getting elected.

WN: You said that the ILWU more or less handled Moloka'i and Lāna'i.

KH: Mm hmm.

WN: Was there any instance where the ILWU didn't back a certain Democratic candidate and so that candidate would have to go on their own to campaign?

KH: Oh, yes. Mm hmm. Well, sometimes they'd refuse to endorse a candidate. I can't think offhand right now. It didn't always work that way. Sometimes the union would oppose a candidate, but he got elected anyway. One year, I know, Eddie Tam refused to appoint Tom Yagi to the police commission. And Tom Yagi got mad, so they [ILWU] refused to endorse Eddie Tam, but Eddie got elected anyway. They refused to endorse Eddie Tam, but they didn't endorse any Republican, let me put it that way. So that was just to show their displeasure. But actually, it turned out that Tom Yagi and Eddie Tam were pretty close friends. I was kind of close to Eddie Tam. And I thought he did a fairly good job, although he was playing golf most of the time.

(Laughter)

But, you know, he had competent people under him. So an interesting situation turned up when he died suddenly before he could take office [as chairman]. He was already elected. This is in 1966. And the board of supervisors at that time had Lanny Morisaki as its chairman, [after] Eddie Tam died. Then there was a lot of finagling among the board members, and they ousted Lanny Morisaki and elected [Manuel S.] Molina as chairman. And they had some good advice from some attorneys, because whoever was elected by the remaining members—members of the board of supervisors—would remain the chairman until the end of the term. And that's when Elmer Cravalho got into the act and passed a law saying, under those circumstances, there should be a new election for the chairman. And that was challenged by Molina, and [Joseph E.] Bulgo, and others. I handled that case. I was the county attorney. [Judge Takashi] Kitaoka [second-circuit court] decided in their favor, so I had to appeal to the [state] supreme court. Kitaoka said that the law was a special law and unconstitutional. Well, I appealed it and fortunately the supreme court reversed Kitaoka on that. And that's why we got a special election for Elmer. And I had always supported Elmer, so he got elected [in 1967] and continued (chuckles) getting elected even under the charter.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, very early in your political career, you were working with Tom Gill and then [O. Vincent] Esposito. And given the nature of the relationship between those two and say, Jack Burns, was that any problem for you ideologically as the years went on?

KH: I don't think so, because after all, we're still Democrats. And the fact that I supported Jack Burns when I came over here, can't be taken to mean that I was disloyal to Tom Gill or to Esposito. Besides, Tom wasn't running for any office. And once you begin supporting a person, you have to have good reason not to support him after a while. I strongly believe in this, that in politics, there is a certain thing called loyalty. I mean, not all-out loyalty, but, if you're a Jack Burns man, unless he does something that really put you off, you're going to keep on supporting him. And you don't say, "I'm not going to support him, because it doesn't look as if he's going to win." In other words, I don't think that you should be an opportunist in politics. There should be some sort of loyalty, even if a person is going to have a hard time. If you believe in what he does, you should support him. But by the same token, the candidate himself must realize his own shortcomings. And I think in that respect, Tom Gill still shows he's real intellectually sound when he decided not to run again for governor [in 1986] the last time after, you know, he had a poll taken. Because a lot of people were interested in seeing him run against [John D.] Waihee and [Cecil] Heftel. But he had a poll taken and it showed that it would be uphill for him. He decided not to run. Well, as I said, I think Tom Gill was a real asset to the party. But, well, but we're all getting old. (Chuckles)

WN: I guess that brings to mind, factionalism. Was there what we could call factionalism in Maui politics?

KH: No, I don't think so. Well, there were some—within the board of supervisors there were some factions, you know. I mentioned between Lanny Morisaki, and Molina, and Elmer Cravalho. But between Elmer and Molina it was kind of a personal kind of thing. They had some kind of run-in in the past and they could never forgive each other for it. So, if Elmer is running, Molina will be urging people not to vote for him. Everybody knows that and vice versa. Although, Elmer, I don't think Elmer went around saying not to vote for this person or that person.

WN: Was there a Gill faction versus a Burns faction here?

KH: Well, it was so overwhelmingly Burns that, you know, you couldn't say that there was any kind of a meaningful division or faction.

WN: Okay. Any questions?

MK: Maybe a closing one. You know, you've been involved in politics for so long, and you've been an active participant as well as an observer. How do you think politics has changed since the 1950s, when you were all getting involved in it, and nowadays?

KH: Well, I don't know. I think more and more, the difference between Republicans and Democrats are beginning to disappear, appears to me. I would say this, that in our days, we were motivated, people like George Fukuoka, Nadao Yoshinaga and myself. Well, I mentioned these people because they were my classmates. I guess we were motivated by social ideals. We were all backers of the ILWU. We always thought that, well, you know, we should help the laboring people, and in conjunction with that, (dog barks) we've always felt

that the laboring people need most help in education. That's why . . .

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: So in one final question, Judge, how has politics changed between now and the time when you first got into it?

KH: As I started to explain, I think the difference between the Republicans and the Democrats are beginning to disappear. The influence of the ILWU is waning. And maybe it's, you could say that maybe the Democrats have accomplished their purpose, because in the old days we were more or less concerned about the welfare of the working classes. And that's where I started. So these days, we're all getting concerned about environmental effects and so forth. But that's---environment is not a Republican or Democrat issue. It should be a issue for everybody. So to that extent, I think the younger people are missing out on some of the important reasons for them being in politics. . . . Well, that's about it.

(Laughter)

MK: Okay.

WN: Well, thank you very much, Judge.

KH: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

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